THE ARTS MONOGRAPHS

William Glackens

By

FORBES WATSON

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THE ARTS
MONOGRAPHS

Georges Seurat
by Walter Pach

William Glackens
by Forbes Watson

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by Alexander Brook

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FORBES WATSON

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY
THE ARTS
1923

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Printed in U. S. A.

FOREWORD

The object of The Arts Monographs is to present in workable, concise, but fully-illustrated form, a series of small books on various artists and subjects of art which shall not be too expensive for general circulation and which, in text and illustration, shall stimulate the interest of the lay reader while at the same time serving the purposes of the more special student.

FORBES WATSON, *Editor.*

ILLUSTRATIONS

Drawing (*Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin*).

Ernest Lawson (Lithograph) (*Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin*).

Etching with Color (*Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin*).

Race Horses (*Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin*).

At Mouquin's.

The Luxembourg Gardens.

Portrait Group.

The Race Track (*The Barnes Foundation*).

Bathers (*The Barnes Foundation*).

Portrait (*The Barnes Foundation*).

Girl Pinning on Hat (*The Barnes Foundation*).

The Raft (*The Barnes Foundation*).

Nude.

The Artist's Daughter.

Young Girl (*The Barnes Foundation*).

Outdoor Restaurant.

Walter Hampden.

Flowers.

WILLIAM GLACKENS

WILLIAM GLACKENS

By Forbes Watson

WILLIAM GLACKENS was born in Philadelphia, March 13th, 1870. He was educated at the public schools and graduated from the Central High School. In 1891 he joined the staff of the *Philadelphia Record* as an artist. In 1892 he went to the *Philadelphia Press* and later to the *Ledger* and then back again to the *Press*.

Meanwhile intermittently he studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Finally in 1895 and 1896 he made the usual American artist's pilgrimage to Paris where he rented a studio and worked but he did not go to any of the schools. In the winter of 1896 he returned to America. At that time George B. Luks was the "premier humorist artist" for the *New York World* and through him Glackens succeeded in getting an assignment to do comic drawings for the *World's* Sunday supplement. This was Glackens' first job in New York. He left it to become a sketch artist on the *New York Herald*. Harry Dart was then head of the *Herald* staff and Ernest

Fahr and Glackens did most of the sketching assignments during the year that Glackens was on the *Herald*.

It was about this time that Glackens began to work for the magazines, *McClure's* in particular. He was sent to Northwest Wisconsin to make drawings of a log drive to illustrate an article by Ray Stannard Baker. Returning from there he again worked for a time on the Sunday *World*. But upon the outbreak of the Spanish war he was sent by *McClure's* to Florida with instructions to go to Cuba as quickly as possible and annex himself to Garcia's army. His drawings were to be sent back as opportunity offered. Fortunately his instructions were cancelled when it was found that the United States Army was going to move that summer. And Glackens accompanied the army together with a vast number of other correspondents who were dumped into Cuba to shift for themselves. He went through the campaign and returned to America with a not too bad attack of malaria. Again he took up magazine work, especially for *Scribner's*, and he also began drawing for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

He became a member of The Society of American Artists and when they were absorbed by the National Academy he became automatically an Associate Academician. He has been a member of many art associations—too many he says. He has always had a horror of official positions but somehow he became president of the Independent and served one term. In 1903 at Hartford, Connecticut, he married Edith Dimock.

The present position occupied by William Glackens as an artist may be described by the word solitary—a word by the way that describes the position of more than one artist, if not of all. For a youthful period artists may flock in schools, groups, crowds, gangs, and by concerted action draw public attention to themselves as a group. Gradually the school disintegrates, the movement subsides, the crowd thins, the noise of organized publicity diminishes, and standing alone, one or two artists are left from each little crowd to go their separate ways and work out their individual salvations.

Mediocrities can organize, play politics, seize upon the best commercial leads, obtain the best galleries, secure official plums and direct the policies of public artistic undertakings. For mediocrities, being bored by the actual practice of their profession, are glad to enjoy the temporary excitement of a plot or plan of organization. But the artist, in the truer sense of the term stands alone, and alone he must find his way. To understand why an artist like Glackens with a wide reputation, in the fulness of his maturity, should occupy a position apart, a brief sketch of certain American conditions is necessary.

Once and once only the American artists organized on a national scale and that was in 1913 under the autocratic guidance of Arthur B. Davies, Walt Kuhn and a few others. The course of American art was changed by a single tremendous stroke. For the first time the outsiders were made to realize what the insiders always knew—that

frock-coated art only wears a frock-coat to hide the fact that it isn't art. But the big stroke has not been repeated, and the academies that trembled momentarily on their foundations have settled back into something like their old positions. Of course things are not as they were and never can be, which may be enough to be thankful for, yet today, ten years after the Armory exhibition, we find the only other large permanent exhibition galleries in New York in the grip of the officials.

The officials occupy most of the seats in the juries of the important museum exhibitions throughout the country, and the regular travelling exhibitions for domestic consumption are almost entirely made up of the works of the manufacturers who belong to the "big club." In a word the presentation of contemporary American art throughout the country is largely controlled by a conventional frock-coated spirit which has outlived the frock-coat itself. Here and there a bright spot like The Arts Club of Chicago is willing to risk one eye.

While the officials, showing a solid front, occupy the main metropolitan fortresses of salesmanship and display, and the corresponding vantage points throughout the country, the attacking forces show no leadership, no generous spirit, no breadth of view. Taking the activities of organized efficiency as the recompense of mediocrity and as a matter of course which is proved by historical precedents in many countries, they separate into small groups and attack each other. They form little academies of their own, more narrow in scope than

the ordinary academy. They indulge in grotesque errors of judgment. They make no distinction between artists and manufacturers. The line of distinction is the line between their little gang and the outside world, and they are more united against the artists outside of their little gang than against the mere politicians. Their organized publicity grossly exaggerates the value of their own limited circle and undermines, not the big obstacle, which is the effete frock-coat, but the perfectly genuine artists who don't belong to their little club. It is one big club on one side and on the other a lot of little clubs just as academic in spirit as the big club. These little clubs with their narrow rules about what is modern and what isn't may sharpen the members' wits by their frays. Perhaps the artist has to choose between the soft happiness of contented and industrious manufacturing and spasms of conflict interspersed with solitude.

The story is too long to complete, but these are a few of the aspects of the professional atmosphere in which an artist of the caliber of William Glackens finds himself in America today. On the one hand he is not fashionable enough—the merest little beginner with a knack at imitating Derain is more fashionable—on the other hand he has passed far beyond decadent impressionism or feeble Sargentism which are the two main movements within the academies. He doesn't belong among the officials, and he is not young enough to enjoy painting for theory's sake. By avocation he is neither a parliamentarian nor a congressman as so many artists are. I have never met an artist who so consistently fails to indulge in blah. He is, I

repeat, under present conditions, a solitary, too purely a painter to be honored officially, too uncomplex to be honored by the up-to-the-minute cerebralists. So much for his position.

Matisse, looking at a picture in a friend's house said to his friend: "You ought to give me that picture."

The friend smiled.

"But she is such a beautiful woman, I could love her so," said Matisse.

Shades of Freud, what simplicity! A senator buying an Aston Knight could hardly be more simple. But between simplicity and simplicity what a difference, the simple echo and the simple feeling.

The summer boarder admires the sunset, not because she is stirred and love of life moves in her, but because she wants her rocking neighbor to believe that she has a soul above the afternoon's gossip. A senator buys a "pretty bit" not because he is moved by bad painting but because he isn't moved by good painting. Matisse saw a Renoir —it was a Renoir that he asked his friend to give him—and said: "What a woman!" Had he seen a potboiler of the same subject he probably would have said: "What a mess!" Simplicities are different after all, which is well to understand, since uncerebral simplicity is, I imagine, at the bottom of the art of William Glackens. He loves the fascinating little daughter of his, that you may see pictured in the reproduction at the beginning of this article. He loves to look at her. The next step is to paint her. He is delighted by the crowd

on the beach at Belport. He enjoys the scene. Ergo he paints it. He is not trying "to save the republic" to prove a theory, to illustrate book-psychology.

Talking about an amateur book-psychologist who makes the mistakes common to muddled learning, Glackens gave vent to the simple exclamation: "Psychology from books. . . ." The phrase trailed off into a sneer. Glackens doesn't get it out of books and try to paste it incongruously on a canvas. His psychology is from life. He has had a long training looking at life. And when what he sees through his eyes gives him pleasure it is natural for him to paint his impression.

In the days when Glackens worked on the Philadelphia newspapers there were no photographic supplements, no news movies. The artist was a reporter. But he did in drawings what his companion reporter did with words. He told the story. He told it as best he could with whatever aid he could secure in the quickest time possible. If he were sent to the coal regions to report a riot of the coal workers, well there was no time to be lost—he saw, observed, took notes. And then coming back from the coal mines in a shaky train, on a rough road, with the car swinging back and forth and up and down, he scratched away as best he could under the adverse circumstances. Concentration and speed counted.

Or it might be a murder, a yacht race, a prize fight, a dead person in a coffin. Not that the dead person was depicted in the coffin. But the evidence that her eyes were blacked or her shoulder broken, or whatever the accident might be was there, and the evidence had to be noted and applied to the living image of the dead.

But why continue with these details? The point is that William Glackens began to be an artist not in a comfortable school where there was much theorizing. He began to be an artist in the school of experience. His work filled a purpose in demand by a common everyday world. All the time that he worked as an illustrating reporter he also worked at painting, always wishing to be a painter, and meanwhile doing something that had to fill a demand, that had to be useful and desired by someone willing to pay for it.

And this is a point not to be forgotten in thinking of the work or the character of William Glackens. Or at least that is my belief. If today he does exactly what he himself wants to regardless of the desires of others, if he disregards with a phenomenal passivity all the excitements of his fellow artists, all the requirements of prospective clients, why is this so? It is because for so long he had to do what he had to do. Now he does what he wants to do.

But to return to his youthful career. While working on the newspapers in Philadelphia, he also went to the Philadelphia Academy, and so much impression did the various instructors make upon him that today he can hardly remember who taught there when he was

a pupil. Yes, Anschutz did teach there. But Glackens was not a steady pupil. He was a working newspaper reporter, and so he could not go to school more than occasionally. He went to school, roughly, when he wasn't working.

In those days he shared a studio with Robert Henri. Henri taught in an art school in the mornings and Glackens worked in the afternoons. The arrangement was perfect.

Glackens was a member of the Philadelphia group of which Henri, Luks, Sloan, and Shinn were other members. He always wanted to be a painter, but he had a homely practical training in illustrating, and he became the leader of the American illustrators. Years ago I remember Albert Sterner's speaking of the complaints that used to come to *McClure's Magazine* because Glacken's illustrations were not sweet enough. They were too real, too original, too fresh and amusing to appeal to a public saturated with false illustration.

Like every artist of the day Glackens eventually found his way to Paris, where the early painting in the Luxembourg Gardens was done. This hints much more of Manet than Renoir, his later enthusiasm. But before he found need of a rich palette akin to Renoir's to express his pure delight in color, Glackens painted such darker simpler canvases, simpler from a color point of view, as the early Summer House. Then there is the party at Mouquin's, which has its period stamped on it.

But Glackens' gift did not flower fully until he came into contact

with the art of Renoir. He delighted in the art of Renoir to such an extent that the uninitiated, the unthinking and the prejudiced have called him an imitator of Renoir. The surest way to see that he is not is to hang up some Renoirs besides some Glackens.

Had Glackens been a cerebralist he would have covered up his tracks. He would have formed a Renoiresque style such as we see in so many German pictures of the day. But Glackens took Renoir just as he took the bathers playing pranks on the beach, or the flowers in the fields. Renoir for him is part of the beauty of the world. He gladly acknowledges his obligations to Renoir. For Glackens doesn't have to try to be original.

Look for example at the reproduction of the young nude girl that was in the New Society exhibition this year. The form is pure Glackens. The Glackens' point of view remains an entity that can easily be traced throughout his extensive production of drawings, pastels and paintings. That point of view is uncomplicated by the problems of the chess player. Men like Marcel Duchamp, for example, get their artistic pleasure from setting up intellectual problems for themselves and working them out. Instinct plays a very small part in such work. It is almost purely intellectual and has a strong appeal to the intellectuals.

Glackens plays at painting. There is no tormented, morbid struggle with profound life facts disturbing him. He doesn't delve deeply into psychology. The color of the world makes him thor-

oughly happy, and to express that happiness in color has become his first and most natural impulse. He lives in a kind of dream of painting, absorbed, distrait, unaware of the problems that bother more unhappy natures.

His opinions of art are clear and unpretentious. Emotional, vague, mouth-filling, and didactic expressions bore him. And he can't be log-rolled by the crowd. I imagine he thinks Derain is more of an æsthete than a creative artist, but his admiration of Pascin is undiluted, and in fact between the two dissimilar arts of Pascin and Glackens there is something in common. Both are among the best illustrators of their day. Both go straight to life for their subjects, and are only interested in their craft in so far as it will more fully express their direct apprehension of the world through their eyes. And both look out on life with eyes that see its humorous aspects. Pascin is more ironic and devilish.

But Glackens is strictly American. His painting tradition is French, but his point of view is American. His sense of humor is American. Look at the beach scenes herewith reproduced. It's hard to say why exactly they appear so American, and of course it is not merely the scene itself. The whole attitude is American. The subject is seen through American eyes.

If we were not so timid about our own painters, or if Glackens had any of the publicity sense that nearly all European artists have found necessary for salvation, there would not be a museum in America

which did not have some of his works. He is one of the gayest, most delightful and accomplished painters in the world today. If he were more heavy-handed and ponderous there would be much more made of our good fortune in having such a painter in our midst.

In the meanwhile the important facts are established. He himself doesn't care what people say or think. The respect that he has won from the artists, as well as the fact that collectors have sought his work—whatever his material success has been or might become does not seem to matter. A vase of flowers, or any other subject suggesting full flowing color could distract him in an instant from all the material problems in the world. Painting is his problem. In this he is completely absorbed. He plays, works, lives with paint. In the early days he reported events for the newspapers. Now he reports whatever he sees that tickles his fancy and gives him a chance to play with color. Consequently in the end you remain at a loss to describe the charm of his painting. You may try to explain the charm of such art, even as people will try to describe the appeal of a particular woman. In the end you have to see for yourself.

Finally one asks why a painter whose color flows and sings and plays, who has a quite phenomenal understanding of how to use the medium of oil paint, should occupy a position so betwixt and between; and the only answer seems to be that in America, particularly, so much art, written, carved, or painted, is dedicated, definitely though not necessarily consciously, to a modernistic or an academic

audience. And this, despite the fact that it is only undedicated work that stands the test of time. The mob rushes to one side or the other. And it requires a rather sound æsthetic constitution for the artist to give no heed except to his own sweet will. If he wants prizes let him beware of too much point of view in his work, and if he wants the intellectuals to applaud, he must wear his modernism on his sleeve, where all can see it with half a glance upward from the "Wastelands of Ulysses," to quote our favorite columnist. And yet it is one of the foolish little twists of modern life that the artist who goes his own pleasant way rejoicing, finally rises mountains higher than those who are too susceptible to the proper dedication of their craft.

Reproductions of Paintings by

WILLIAM GLACKENS

Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin

DRAWING

Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin

ERNEST LAWSON (Lithograph)

Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin

ETCHING WITH COLOR

Collection of Mr. Albert Gallatin

RACE HORSES

AT MOUQUIN'S

THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS

PORTRAIT GROUP

The Barnes Foundation

THE RACE TRACK

The Barnes Foundation

BATHERS

The Barnes Foundation

PORTRAIT

The Barnes Foundation

GIRL PINNING ON HAT

The Barnes Foundation

THE RAFT

NUDE

THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER

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YOUNG GIRL

OUTDOOR RESTAURANT

WALTER HAMPDEN

FLOWERS

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